

Studies in Romans-09

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of resisting vengeance, obeying human government, and living a life of love and spiritual alertness.

Duration: 39:31

Scripture: Matthew 7:12, Romans 13:10-12, Romans 13:14, Romans 14:13, Romans 15:5-6

Topics: "Studies"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of love and how it should guide our actions towards others. He explains that love never seeks to harm others, but actively seeks their welfare and honor. The sermon also highlights the need for spiritual alertness and moral purity, as the time is short and our salvation is nearer than ever. The preacher encourages believers to throw off sinful behaviors and put on the armor of light, living a holy life. Additionally, the sermon addresses the topic of obedience to government authority, stating that while we should obey, there are exceptions when it comes to compromising our loyalty to Jesus Christ.

Transcript

This is a continuation of the exposition of Romans chapter 12. We have come to verse 19, where we read that we must resist the tendency to avenge wrongs that are done against us. Scripture says that we should give place to wrath, and this may mean give place to the wrath of God, that is, allow God to take care of it for you, or it may mean to give place to wrath in the sense of submitting passively in a spirit of non-resistance.

The rest of the verse favors the first interpretation. Vengeance is God's prerogative. We should not interfere with what is His right.

He will repay at the right time and in the right manner. Verse 20. Christianity goes beyond non-resistance to active benevolence.

It does not destroy its enemies by violence, but converts them by love. It feeds the enemy when he is hungry and satisfies his thirst, thus heaping live coals on his head. If the live coal treatment seems cruel, it's because it's not properly understood.

To heap live coals on a person's head means to make him ashamed of his hostility and to surprise him with unconventional kindness. Verse 21. Darby explains the first part of this verse as follows.

If my bad temper puts you in a bad temper, you have been overcome of evil. George Washington Carver Watts said, I will never let another man ruin my life by making me hate him. In other words, he would not allow evil to conquer him.

But the scripture says, overcome evil with good. It is characteristic of Christian teaching that it does not stop with the negative prohibition, but goes on to the positive exhortation. Evil can be overpowered with good.

This is a weapon we should use more frequently. Stanton treated Lincoln with venomous hatred. He said it was foolish to go to Africa in search of a gorilla when the original gorilla could be found in Springfield, Illinois.

Lincoln took it all in stride. Later, Lincoln appointed Stanton as war minister, feeling that he was the most qualified for the office. After Lincoln was shot, Stanton called him the greatest leader of men.

Love had conquered. That brings us to chapter 13, verse 1. Those who have been justified by faith are obligated to be subject to human government. Actually, the obligation applies to everyone, but the apostle here is concerned especially with believers.

God established human government after the flood when he decreed, Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed. That decree gave authority to men to judge criminal matters and to punish offenders. In every ordered society there must be authority and submission to that authority.

Otherwise you have a state of anarchy, and you cannot survive indefinitely under anarchy. Any government is better than no government. So God has instituted human government, and no government exists apart from his will.

This does not mean that the Lord approves tyranny, brutality, and corruption, but he does establish the fact of governmental authority. Verse 2. It follows that anyone who disobeys or rebels against the government is disobeying and rebelling against what God has ordained. Those who resist lawful authority earn and deserve punishment.

There is an exception, of course. A Christian is not required to obey if the government orders him to sin or to compromise his loyalty to Jesus Christ. No government has a right to command a person's conscience.

So there are times when a believer must, by obeying God, incur the wrath of man. In such cases he must be prepared to pay the penalty neatly and uncomplainingly. Under no circumstances should he rebel against the government or join in an attempt to overthrow it.

Verse 3. As a general rule, people who do what is right do not need to fear the authorities. It's only those who break the law who have to fear punishment. So if anybody wants to enjoy a life free from tickets, fines, trials, and imprisonments, the thing to do is to be a law-abiding citizen.

Then he will win the approval of the authorities, not their censure. Verse 4. The ruler, whether he is a president, governor, mayor, or judge, is a minister of God in the sense that he is a servant or representative of the Lord. He may not know God personally, but still he is the Lord's man officially.

Thus David repeatedly referred to the wicked king Saul as the Lord's anointed. In spite of Saul's repeated attempts on David's life, the latter would not allow his men to harm the king. Why? Because Saul was the king, and as such he was the Lord's appointee.

As servants of God, rulers are designed to promote the good of the people, their security, tranquility, and general welfare. Of course, if a man insists on breaking the law, he can expect to pay for it, because the government has the authority to bring him to trial and to punish him. In the expression, he beareth not the sword in vain, we have a strong statement concerning the power which God vests in the government.

The sword is not just an innocuous symbol of power. A scepter would have served that purpose. It seems to me that the sword speaks of the ultimate power of the ruler, that is, to inflict capital punishment.

So it will not do to say that capital punishment was for the Old Testament era only, and not for the New. Here is a statement in the New Testament that the government has the authority to take the life of a capital offender. People argue against this by quoting Exodus 20, verse 13, Thou shalt not kill.

But that commandment refers to murder, and capital punishment is not murder. Again the apostle reminds us that the ruler is a minister of God, but this time he adds an avenger of wrath to him that doeth evil. In other words, in addition to being a minister of God to us for good, as in verse 4, he also serves God by dispensing punishment to those who break the law.

What this means is that we should be obedient subjects of the government for two reasons, the fear of punishment and the desire to maintain a good conscience. We owe the government not only obedience but financial support through the payment of taxes. It is to our advantage to live in a society of law and order, with police and fire protection, so we must be willing to bear our share of the cost involved.

Government officials are giving their time and talents, and carrying out God's will for the maintenance of a stable society, so they are entitled to support. Verse 7. The fact that believers are citizens of heaven does not exempt them from responsibility to human government. They must pay whatever taxes are levied on their income, their real estate and their personal property.

They must pay required custom and merchandise being transported from one country to another. They must demonstrate a respectful fear of displeasing those who are charged with enforcing the laws. And they must show respect for the names and offices of all civil servants, even if they can't always respect the lives of those civil servants.

In this connection, Christians should never join in speaking in a derogatory way of the president. Even in the heat of a political campaign, they should refuse to join in the verbal abuse that is heaped upon the head of state. It is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.

Verse 8. The subject widens to the debt we owe to all men, the debt of love. But 1st Paul inserts a pointed injunction against the evils of other forms of indebtedness. It's a prohibition against installment purchases with their exorbitant interest rates.

It's a prohibition against buying on credit beyond one's means. It's an encouragement to delay purchases except when funds are on hand and then only for the purchase of needs. A possible exception is the purchase of a house on a mortgage, in which case the loan is adequately secured by the value of the property.

In general, Paul's admonition teaches us to practice financial responsibility by living modestly and within our means. The one debt that is always outstanding is the obligation to love. The word that is used for love in Romans, with one exception, that's in chapter 12, verse 10, signifies a deep, unselfish, superhuman affection which one person has for another.

This otherworldly love is not activated by any virtue in the person loved. That is, it is completely undeserved. It's unlike any other love in that it goes out not only to the lovable, but to one's enemies as well.

This love manifests itself in giving, and generally in sacrificial giving. Thus, God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. Christ loved the church and gave himself for it.

This love is primarily a matter of the will rather than the emotions. The fact that we are commanded to love indicates that it is something we can choose to do. If it were an uncontrollable emotion that swept over us at unexpected moments, we could scarcely be held accountable.

This does not deny, however, that the emotions can be involved. It's impossible for an unconverted person to manifest this divine love. In fact, it's impossible even for a believer to demonstrate it in his own strength.

It can only be exhibited by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Love found its perfect expression on earth in the person of the Lord Jesus. It is God's will that his people love one another and all men.

Our love to God manifests itself in obedience to his commandments. The man who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law, or at least that section of the law that teaches love for our fellow men. Verse 9. The apostle cites four commandments which forbid acts of unlove to one's neighbor.

Love doesn't exploit another person's body. It doesn't take another person's life. It doesn't steal another person's property.

It doesn't even think wrong thoughts concerning others or toward their possessions. Paul says, and if there be any other commandment, yes, there are two others. Thou shalt not bear false witness and honor thy father and thy mother.

They all boil down to the same dictum. Love your neighbor as yourself. Don't do to him what you wouldn't want him to do to you.

Verse 10. Love never seeks to harm another. Rather, it actively seeks the welfare and honor of all.

Therefore, the man who acts in love is really filling the requirements of the second table of the law. Verse 11. The rest of the chapter encourages a life of spiritual alertness and moral purity.

The time is short. The dispensation of grace is drawing to a close. The lateness of the hour demands that all lethargy and inactivity be put away.

Our salvation is nearer than ever. The Savior is coming to take us to the Father's house. Verse 12.

This present age is like a night of sin that has just about run its course. The day of eternal glory is about to dawn for believers. This means that we should throw off all the filthy garments of worldliness, that is, everything that is associated with unrighteousness and evil.

And we should put on the armor of light, which means the protective covering of a holy life. The pieces of armor are described in Ephesians 6, verses 14 through 18. And they are the elements of true Christian character.

Verse 13. Notice that the emphasis is on our practical Christian walk. Since we are children of the day, we should walk as sons of light.

What does a Christian have to do with wild parties, with drunken brawls, with sex orgies, with vile excesses, or even with bickering and envy? Nothing at all. Verse 14. The best policy we can follow is, first of all, to put on the Lord Jesus Christ.

This means we should adopt his whole lifestyle, live as he lived, accept him as our guide and example. Secondly, we should not make provision for the flesh to fulfill its lust. The flesh here is the old corrupt nature.

It incessantly cries to be pampered with comfort, luxury, illicit sexual indulgence, empty amusements, worldly pleasures, dissipation, materialism, and so forth. We make provision for the flesh when we buy things that are associated with temptation, when we make it easy for ourselves to sin, when we give a higher priority to the physical than to the spiritual. Chapter 14 of Romans, verse 1. The passage from chapter 14, verse 1, to chapter 15, verse 13, deals with important principles to guide God's people in dealing with matters of moral indifference.

These are the matters that so often cause conflict among believers, but such conflict is quite unnecessary, as we shall see. In this passage, the weak brother is one who has unfounded scruples over matters of secondary importance. In this context, he was probably a converted Jew who still had scruples about eating non-kosher foods or working on Saturday.

The first principle is this. The weak brother should be received into the local fellowship, but not with the idea of engaging him in disputes about his ultra-scrupulousness. Christians can have happy fellowship without agreeing on non-essentials.

Verse 2. A believer who walks in the full enjoyment of his Christian liberty has faith based on the teachings of the New Testament that all foods are clean. They are sanctified by the word of God and prayer, as we read in 1 Timothy chapter 4, verses 4 and 5. A believer with a weak conscience may have qualms about eating pork or any other meat for that matter. He may be a vegetarian.

Verse 3. So the second principle is that there must be mutual forbearance. The mature Christian must not put down his weak brother. Neither should the weak brother condemn as a sinner the one who enjoys ham, shrimp, or lobster.

God has received him into his family, a member in good standing. Verse 4. The third principle is that each believer is a servant of the Lord and we have no right to sit in judgment as if we were the master. It's before his own master that each one stands approved or disapproved.

One may look down on the other with icy hauteur, certain that he will make shipwreck of the faith because of his views on these matters, but such an attitude is wrong. God will sustain those on both sides of the question. His power to do so is adequate.

Verse 5. Some of the early Jewish Christians still looked on the Sabbath as a day of obligation. They had a conscience about doing any work on Saturday. In that sense, they esteemed one day above another.

The other believers did not share these Judaistic scruples. They looked on every day alike. They did not look upon six days as secular and one as sacred.

To them, all days were sacred. But what about the Lord's Day, the first day of the week? Does it not hold a special place in the lives of Christians? We see in the New Testament that it was the day of the Lord's resurrection. The day of Pentecost was on a Sunday.

The disciples gathered to break bread on Sunday. Paul instructed the Corinthians to take collection on the first day of the week. But rather than being a day of obligation, it is a day of special privilege.

Released from our ordinary employment, we can set it aside in a special way for worshiping and serving our Lord. Nowhere in the New Testament are Christians ever told to keep the Sabbath. Yet at the same time, we recognize the principle of one day in seven.

One day of rest after six days of work. Whatever view one holds on this subject, the principle is let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind. Now it should be clear that such a principle applies only to matters that are morally neutral.

When it comes to the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, there is no room for individual opinions. But in this area where things are neither right nor wrong in themselves, there is room for differing views. They should not be allowed to become tests of fellowship.

Verse six. The one who regards the day is the Jewish believer, for example, who still has a bad conscience about doing any work on Saturday. He doesn't look upon Sabbath keeping as a means of obtaining or retaining his salvation.

To him it is simply a matter of pleasing the Lord. The mature Christian who has liberty to eat whatever is set before him gives God thanks for the food. So does the man with the weak conscience about eating non-kosher food.

He's equally careful to thank the Lord for whatever food he does eat. In both cases, God is honored and thanked. So why should this be made a matter of strife and conflict? Verse seven.

The Lordship of Christ enters into every aspect of the life of a believer. We don't live to ourselves, but to the Lord. We don't die to ourselves, but to the Lord.

It's true that what we do and say affects others, but that's not the thought in this verse. Here Paul is emphasizing that the Lord is the goal and object of the lives of his people. Verse eight.

Everything we do in life is subject to God's scrutiny and approval. We test things by how they appear in his presence. Even in death we aspire to glorify the Lord as we go to be with him.

Both in life and death we belong to him. Verse nine. One of the reasons for which Christ died and rose again is that he might be our Lord and that we might be his willing subjects, gladly rendering to him the devotion of our grateful hearts.

And his Lordship continues even in death when our bodies lie in the grave and our spirits and souls are in his presence. Verse ten. Because this is true, it is folly for an over-scrupulous Jewish Christian to condemn the brother who doesn't keep the Jewish calendar and who doesn't limit himself to kosher foods.

Likewise it is wrong for the strong brother to show contempt to the weak brother. The fact is that every one of us is going to stand before the judgment seat of God and that will be the only evaluation that really counts. In this verse the best manuscripts speak of the judgment seat of God rather than of Christ.

But we know that Christ will be the judge since the Father has committed all judgment to him. John 5.22. This judgment has to do with a believer's service, not his sins. It is a time of review and reward and is not to be confused with the judgment of the Gentile nations or the judgment of the great white throne.

The latter is the final judgment of all the wicked dead. Verse eleven. The certainty of our appearance before the Bema of God is reinforced by a quotation from Isaiah 45.23 where Jehovah himself makes a strong affirmation that everyone will bow before him in acknowledgement of his supreme authority.

Verse twelve. And so it is clear that we will all give an account of ourselves not of our brothers to God. We judge one another too much and without the proper authority or knowledge.

Verse thirteen. Instead of sitting in judgment on our fellow Christians in these matters of moral indifference we should make this legitimate judicial decision namely that we will never do anything to hinder a brother in his spiritual progress. None of these non-essential matters are important enough to cause a brother to stumble or to fall.

Verse fourteen. Paul knew and we know that no foods are ceremonially unclean any longer as they were for a Jew living under the law. Jesus pronounced all foods clean in Mark 7.19 New American Standard Bible.

The food we eat is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. But if a weak brother thinks it's wrong for him to eat pork for instance then it actually is wrong. To eat it would be to violate that God-given faculty known as the conscience.

When Paul says here that nothing is unclean of itself we must realize that he's speaking only of these indifferent matters. There are plenty of things in life that are unclean such as pornographic literature, suggestive jokes, filthy movies, and every form of immorality. Paul's statement must be understood in the light of the context.

The Christian does not contract ceremonial defilement by eating foods which the law of Moses branded as unclean. Verse fifteen. When I sit down to eat with a weak brother should I insist on my legitimate right to eat crab Louie or lobster Thermidor even if I know he thinks it's wrong? If I do, I'm not acting in love because love thinks of others not of self.

Love forgoes its legitimate right in order to promote the welfare of a brother. A dish of food isn't as important as the spiritual well-being of a person for whom Christ died. And yet if I selfishly parade my rights in these matters I can do irreparable damage in the life of a weak brother.

It isn't worth it when you remember that his soul was redeemed at such a towering cost the precious blood of Christ. Verse sixteen. So the principle here is that we should not allow these secondary things which are perfectly permissible in themselves to give occasion to others to condemn us for our looseness or

lovelessness.

It would be like sacrificing our good name for a mess of pottages. Verse seventeen. What really counts in the kingdom of God is not dietary regulations but spiritual realities.

The kingdom of God is the sphere where God is acknowledged as supreme ruler. In its widest sense it includes all who even profess allegiance to God. But in its inward reality it includes only those who are born again.

That is its usage here. The subjects of the kingdom are not intended to be food faddists, gourmets or wine connoisseurs. They should be characterized by lives of practical righteousness by dispositions of peace and harmony and by mindsets of joy in the Holy Spirit.

Verse eighteen. It isn't what a man eats or doesn't eat that matters. It's a holy life that wins God's honor and man's approval.

Those who put the emphasis on righteousness, peace and joy serve Christ by obeying his teachings. Verse nineteen. Thus another principle emerges.

Instead of bickering over inconsequential matters we should make every effort to maintain peace and harmony in the Christian fellowship. Instead of stumbling others by insisting on our rights we should strive to build up others in their most holy faith. Verse twenty.

God is doing a work in the life of each one of his children. It is frightening to think of hindering that work in the life of a weak brother, for instance over such secondary matters as foods, drinks or days. For the child of God all foods are now clean but if a man has a bad conscience about eating something then it's wrong for him to do so.

The more we trifle with our conscience the less sensitive it becomes and the more callous we become. Verse twenty-one. It's a thousand times better to refrain from meat or wine or anything else rather than to offend a brother or cause him to decline spiritually.

Giving up our legitimate rights is a small price to pay for the care of one who is weak. Verse twenty-two. I may have complete liberty to partake of every kind of food knowing that God gave it to be received with thanksgiving but I should not needlessly flaunt that liberty before those who are weak.

It's better to exercise that liberty in private when no one could possibly be offended. After all, why should I deliberately put myself in a position of condemnation for something that's perfectly permissible in my own eyes? As far as the weak brother is concerned it's wrong for him to eat anything about which he has conscientious scruples. We read this in verse twenty-three.

His eating is not an act of faith. That is, he has a bad conscience about it and it is sin to violate the conscience. Chapter fifteen, verse one.

The first thirteen verses of this chapter continue the subject of the previous chapter dealing with matters of moral indifference. Tensions had arisen between converts from Judaism and those from paganism so Paul here pleads for harmonious relations between these Jewish and Gentile Christians. Those who are strong, that is, with full liberty regarding things that are morally indifferent should not please themselves by selfishly asserting their rights.

Rather they should treat their weak brothers with kindness and consideration making full allowance for their excessive scruples. Verse two. Here the principle is don't live to please self.

Live to please others, to do good to them, to build them up. This is the Christian approach. Verse three.

The Savior has given us the example. He lived to please his father, not himself. He said, the reproaches of them that reproach thee fell upon me.

Which means that he was so completely taken up with God's honor that when men insulted God he took it as a personal insult to himself. Verse four. This quotation from the Psalms reminds us that the Old Testament scriptures were written for our instruction.

While they were not written directly to us they contain invaluable lessons for us. As we encounter problems, conflicts, tribulation and troubles the scriptures teach us to be steadfast and they impart comfort. Thus instead of sinking under the waves we are sustained by the hope that the Lord will see us through.

Verse five. This consideration leads Paul to express the wish that the God who gives steadfastness and comfort will enable the strong and the weak, Gentile and Jewish Christians to live harmoniously according to the teaching and example of Christ Jesus. Verse six.

The result will be that the saints will be united in the worship of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. What a picture! Saved Jews and saved Gentiles worshiping the Lord with one mouth. There are four mentions of the mouth in this epistle and they form a biographical outline of a well-saved soul.

At the beginning, that is in chapter three, verse fourteen the man's mouth was full of cursing and bitterness. Then his mouth was stopped and he was brought in guilty before the judge. Chapter three, verse nineteen.

Next he confesses with his mouth Jesus as Lord. Chapter ten, verse nine. And finally his mouth is actively praising and worshiping the Lord.

Chapter fifteen, verse six. Verse seven. One more principle emerges from all this.

In spite of any differences that might exist concerning secondary matters we should receive one another as Christ received us. Here is the true basis for reception in the local assembly. We do not receive on the basis of denominational affiliation or spiritual maturity or social status.

We should receive those whom Christ has received in order to promote the glory of God. Verse eight. In the next six verses the apostle reminds his readers that the ministry of the Lord Jesus includes Jews and Gentiles and the implication is that our hearts should also be big enough to include both.

Certainly Christ came to serve the circumcision, that is the Jewish people. God had repeatedly promised that he would send the Messiah to Israel and Christ's coming confirmed the truth of those promises. Verse nine.

But the Lord Jesus brings blessings to the Gentiles also. God purposed that the nations should hear the gospel and that those people who believe should praise him for his great mercy. This should not come as a surprise to Jewish believers because it is frequently foretold in their scriptures.

In Psalm 18 verse 49 for example, David anticipates the day when the Messiah would sing praise to God in the midst of a host of Gentile believers. Verse ten. In Deuteronomy 32 verse 43 the Gentiles are pictured as rejoicing in the blessings of salvation with the people of Israel.

Verse 11. Again in Psalm 117 verse 1 we hear Israel calling on the Gentiles to worship Jehovah in the millennial reign of the Messiah. Verse 12.

Finally Isaiah adds his testimony to the inclusion of the Gentiles in the dominion of the Messiah. Isaiah 11 verses 1 and 10. The particular point here is that the Gentiles would share in the privileges of the Messiah and of his gospel.

The Lord Jesus is the root of Jesse in the sense that his lineage as man descends from Jesse through David. Verse 13. So Paul closes this section with a gracious benediction praying that the God who gives good hope through grace will fill the saints with joy and peace as they believe on him.

Perhaps he is thinking especially of Gentile believers here as the Living Bible suggests. But the prayer is suitable for all. And it is true that those who are bound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit have no time to quarrel over non-essentials.

Our common hope is a powerful unifying force in the Christian life. Now on the other side of the tape we'll begin at chapter 15 verse 14 and carry on through the end of the epistle.

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